

A brief introduction to the development of the public librarianship in China

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Abstract This paper briefly introduces the development status, background and prospect of the public librarianship in China. It contains a brief analysis of the basic situation of the public library in China at present according to the data announced by the government, and gives an explanation about China's public library orientation, working condition, service characteristics and existing problems. In addition, the author provides a detailed description of the library's present working emphasis in order to present readers with an overall view of the basic condition of China's public library development at present time.

Keywords Public library, Service system of public culture, Library development, Library construction, Reader service

The public library, being a welfare enterprise, is an important component of China's librarianship as it renders cultural services to most areas of China proper as well as to the largest number of people. Since the 1990s, China's public librarianship has developed steadily in keeping pace with the economic growth of China. In many newly built or expanded public libraries, the book collection has been steadily enriched, and the facilities and service level have also been further improved. With the advent of 21st century, there is a tendency for the public library of China to accelerate its development. Some important public culture construction projects undertaken by the government give great impetus to the public library development.

The Political Bureau Meeting of the CCP Central Committee convened in June 2007 focused on the strengthening of the construction of the public culture service system. It clearly put forward the basic frame of the service system of public culture covering the whole society, and pointed out that the service system was aiming to realize and safeguard the basic cultural rights of the public and to satisfy their basic cultural needs. In August 2007, the State Council of China issued a notice named *Several Suggestions for the Strengthening of Constructing Public Culture Service System*. In the Report to 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2007, President Hu Jintao clearly proposed:



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“... We must continue to develop nonprofit cultural programs as the main approach to ensuring the basic cultural rights and interests of the people, increase spending on such programs, and build more cultural facilities in urban communities and in rural areas.”

The promulgation of these policies indicates that the Chinese government has a more profound level of understanding of the cultural construction. It results in that the safeguard policies and conditions for the development of China's public librarianship have undergone unprecedented changes. It can be said that China's public librarianship is going to enter a period of rapid development.

1 The basic situation of the public library in China

The public library of China is administrated by the local cultural department, which also manages the library expenditure, staff and service development. In other words, China's public libraries are distributed in accordance with administrative regions and their service clientele are the citizens within such regions. Except the National Library of China, public libraries in China are divided hierarchically into several administrative levels such as provincial, municipal, counties and districts, etc. In the past, there was only one sizable library built within each of such administrative divisions. However, with the economic growth in the recent few years, lots of libraries mushroomed in residential districts, villages, towns, communities and countryside, which have become a new phenomenon of the public library development. It should be made clear here however, that for some historical reasons, these grass-root libraries are not included as yet in the official statistical reports of the government (only those at county or above of administrative levels are included in the government's statistical reports).

According to the statistics in *Statistical Yearbook of Chinese Culture 2007*, at the end of 2006, the number of public libraries above county level was 2,778 (including the National Library of China) with 51,311 members of library staff. The total area of library space was 7,189,000 m² with an increase of 419,000 m². The book collections all over the country were more than 500 million volumes with an increase of 19.69 million, increased by 4.1% over the previous year. In 2006, the number of new book acquisitions was 16.86 million volumes with an increase of 1.51 million volumes, increased by 9.8%. The library item circulation was 252 million items with an increase of 18.56 million items, increased by 8.1% over the previous year. The number of reader's card registration was 10.62 million with an increase of 980,000 reader's cards, increased by 9.2% over the previous year. There were 37,148 electronic reading servers in the whole country with an increase of 4,577 servers, increased by 14.1%. In addition, about 2,741 people joined in 83,100 readers' activities in 2006 (Table 1)^[1].

In China, according to the library collection in public libraries above county level, the book volume per capita is 0.34 volumes, which is lower than 1.5–2 volumes per capita, the standard of IFLA. However, the book volume per capita is 0.7–1.2 volumes in some developed cities, such as Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. Therefore, we



Table 1 Statistics of the public library in China during the years 2005 and 2006

Items	2005	2006	Increase rate (%)
Total floor space/m ²	6,770,000	7,189,000	6.19
Book collection/Volumes	480.31 million	500 million	4.1
New book acquisitions /Volumes	15.35 million	16.86 million	9.8
Circulation items/Volumes	233.44 million	252 million	8.1
Readers' cards	9.64 million	10.62 million	9.2
Electronic reading terminals	32,571	37,148	14.1

should make greater efforts to increase the book-purchasing funds for the public library in the developing regions so as to narrow the gap between the developed and developing regions. Particularly, the book-purchasing funds of the public library in some villages or towns cannot even be guaranteed from one fiscal year to another, which is a serious problem at present.

Additionally, about 500,000 people in China share one public library resources, which is far lower than the IFLA standard that about 20,000 people share one public library resources. As the statistical figures do not include the increasing number of local libraries (mainly in villages, towns and counties), especially in some provinces in the Eastern part of China and in some developed cities, the number of people in the released data should be actually lesser than that in the official statistics reported by the government.

In short, there is still a disparity between the number of public libraries in China and those in some developed countries. But the gap has been obviously closing in the last two years thanks to the continuous financial support from the government and society. In recent years, comparing with the local library (mainly in villages, towns and counties), more and more large-scale libraries equipped with advanced facilities have been built in provinces and cities, which are not in the least inferior to those in foreign countries. Moreover, the aggregated volumes of collection of these public libraries in China cannot satisfy the information needs of the large population in China. Therefore, the government should increase the volumes of monographic collection of public libraries not only in developed regions, but more importantly in some provinces in the Midwest.

2 The service of public libraries in China

In the past half century, the operation of public libraries in China depended on the funding of their respective local governments. As such, the government policy played a decisive role in steering the operation of public libraries in different historical periods. The fundamental ethos of "providing equal services to all human beings" was widely accepted and held in high esteem by those active in the library circle. Though this ethos suffered serious backlash in the 1950–70s for some historical reasons, the public library re-entered its path for healthy growth along with a stabilized new social order and economic growth in the 1980s and there afterwards.

In recent years, following the "human-oriented" service ethos, Chinese public libraries provide readers with convenient and fast services to the brim of their



capacity. For instance, services such as sending books to readers' home, book-lending through the network, intra-regional library loan and return, etc. They also provide bibliographical retrieval, database searching and online consultation by means of applying computer network and telecommunication technologies. By the end of 2006, network reference service had been provided in nearly 70% of public libraries in provinces all over the country. In the meantime, some libraries have also introduced self-service system, which facilitated the lending or returning books around the clock. Moreover, most public libraries are now equipped with electronic reading rooms where readers can surf the Internet and searching database at will.

In view of the service objectives there is no real difference between public libraries in China and those in foreign countries. However, there are some subtle differences in their core service as well as in their service delivery mode, which are led or influenced by the prevailing administrative system, national habits and the degree of national economic development, etc.

In terms of conventional library services such as book reading and lending, there is no difference between public libraries in China and those in foreign countries either. These conventional services as the main work of the public library play a positive role in people's character building, cultural and entertainment activities as well as learning and research. However, the amount of lending volumes each time in China is less than that of foreign libraries because of the low level of book collections per capita in Chinese public libraries. Generally speaking, under a more stringent condition, Chinese readers can borrow no more than 10 volumes each time. However, the amount of book lending is between 30–50 volumes each time in libraries of developed countries. It is believed that Chinese readers will enjoy a more satisfying service in the future with the steady growth of book collections available in libraries per capita.

In view of reference service, there are some influential websites, such as the Combined Reference and Consultation Network (CRCN) jointly developed by the libraries in Guangdong Province and other 33 public libraries and the Collaborated Online Reference Services (CORS) jointly developed by Shanghai Library and other libraries in Shanghai. Moreover, when our public libraries make an exchange agreement with foreign libraries, we realize that there is actually a difference in work content between the public library at home and abroad. The consultants in Chinese public libraries can undertake the research projects consigned by their clientele in accordance with their requirements. In contrast, the reference consultants in foreign libraries only give brief guidance to their readers to do the research by themselves rather than taking over any large-scale research project requests directly on a fee-paid basis. Such requests are usually referred to professional consulting firms. Public libraries of China have to perform a special function of handling any research projects requested by their clientele because of the underdeveloped consulting business. In addition, public libraries of China attaches great importance to their capability in providing professional and consulting services to the government such as sending books to those in remote villages, towns and country sides in order to help solve some practical problems on hand in their life and production activities.



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The public library of China makes a remarkable achievement in organizing reader's socio-cultural activities. About 2,741 readers get involved in 83,100 various activities every year. The public library pays much attention to the social education of readers in the form of lectures, exhibitions and seminars, which are distinctive in contents, modes and characteristics. The annual special events, such as scientific and technological week, enrich readers' ex-curricular life. To attract more readers, many libraries provide a few unique and outstanding services to the public to create their own service brand-name effect. For instance, many kinds of public lectures are held like Lectures of Shanghai Library, Beijing Classroom of Capital Library and Doctorate Forum of Nanshan Library, Baiyun Forum of Dalian Library, and a series of special lectures of Changchun Library. At present, each and every large library attaches importance to the special library lecture series and the development of lecture resource sharing.

In catering the special information and cultural needs of their clientele, public libraries of China developed some unique service sites either within or without the physical confine of their library buildings such as Dongguan Comic Library, Olympic Salon of Capital Library, etc. In recent years, some new special services have been provided to the physically impaired groups such as a library for the blind in Shenyang. Furthermore, some special reading rooms are reserved for the migrant-workers in the city like Beijing and Guilin, as well as in Hunan Province. In Shandong, Jiangxi and Guangdong Provinces and in the city like Shanghai and Beijing, many libraries establish cooperative relationships with prisons in their administrative regions and provide services directly to those who are serving their jail terms.

In view of literature resources construction, the number of purchasing books of the public library above county level had amounted to 16.86 million with an increase of 1.51 million, increased by 9.8% over the previous year. However, the book capacity is still insufficient to satisfy the needs of the large population in China. Public libraries in China not only provide the conventional services to the public, but also pay attention to the organization of unique resources and local document resources. The typical examples are the special reading room constructions and database construction in numerous public libraries. Particularly since the 1990s, the public library in provinces and cities has begun to digitize the print resources and to establish many unique databases of their own step by step. Many public libraries have begun to digitalize the rare ancient books as Liaoning Library and Shanghai Library did starting in 1996. They also digitized the local document resources, such as the Beijing Memory Project of the Capital Library of China, etc. As far as unique library collections are concerned, the more notables are Shaman Culture of Jilin Library, Jinmen Quyi of Tianjin Library, Resource Database with Local Characteristics of Shandong Library, Yunnan Wildlife of Yunnan Library, etc. Generally speaking, most large and middle sized public libraries in China are constructing their own unique databases now. In the meantime, the implementation of the National Cultural Information Resource Sharing Project speeds up the digital resources construction of the public library. Many libraries contribute some digital resources with regional features to this collaborative project.



In view of digital library construction, the public library of China is a latecomer. A major project initially instigated by the Ministry of Culture, the Chinese Pilot Digital Library Program formally launched in 1997. It was jointly developed by the National Library of China, Shanghai Library, Nanjing Library, Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province, Liaoning Library, Shenzhen Library and Guilin Library of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which have provided beneficial experience to the digital library development of China. The operation of China Digital Library Co. Ltd. in 2000 marked that the digital library construction has entered into the application stage. Presently, Shanghai Digital Library, Guangdong Digital Library and Dongguan Digital Library are all under construction. However, digital libraries built by the public library have some deficiencies in funding, cutting-edge technologies and the lack of social influence/prestige compared with those digital libraries now under construction by the National Library of China, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, colleges and universities and/or by the military forces.

3 The important cultural projects with the participation of public libraries of China

In recent years, as an integral part of the public culture service scheme, the role of public libraries of China is increasingly being given to a weightier status. Besides the steady increase of fund allocations in the investment in infrastructures and book-purchasing, some other important cultural projects led by the Ministry of Culture also brought in significant collateral new opportunities for the development of public libraries in China.

For example, National Cultural Information Resource Sharing Project is both an important national digitization project of library resources aimed to ease the shortage of information services in the remote rural areas of mid-western China and an important undertaking in terms of constructing a public cultural delivery system. This project will, when complete in 2010, build a Web-based cultural service network covering both the urban and rural areas of China. The central government has already invested cumulatively about RMB ¥907 million and the local governments have invested about RMB ¥700 million since 2002. In 2008, the central government has made a special appropriation again of about RMB ¥738 million to build 700 branch centers at county level and 125,000 service stations in the rural villages. As public libraries of different administrative levels are all subsidiary service stations of these resources sharing project, they play an important role collectively in information resources construction and dissemination. Relying on the public library in the whole country, the project aims at integrating the valued cultural resources by applying modern information technologies, so as to realize the collaborative construction and sharing of cultural resources through the Web within China proper. Currently, there are more than 350,000 basic service stations and 65 TB digital resources all over the country^[2]. It is planned that the coverage ratio of branch centers at county level ought to reach 60% and the total resource should reach 76 TB in 2008.



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In 2005, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finance initiated a project of Preserving Chinese Antiquarian Books. It aims at preserving the original copies of Chinese antiquarian books by conducting a general survey of Chinese antiquarian books, improving their housing and preservation environment and restoring the damaged ones in a systematic way. In January 2007, the State Council issued *Suggestions on the Further Strengthening the Preservation of Antiquarian Books*, which had the objective of such a mission unequivocally clarified. In May 2007, the National Center for Preservation and Conservation of Ancient Books was set up in the National Library of China, which marked the planning had been put into practice. It was the first time that China carried out the general survey of Chinese antiquarian books since China was founded in 1949. The emphasis of the general survey in 2007 was those classified as the first-tier and the second-tier antiquarian books, and the rest antiquarian books that classified below the second-tier will be surveyed during 2008–2010 along with the establishment of a satisfactory cataloging mechanism. In the process of the general survey, the National Library of China takes charge in collecting the survey results from the whole country for the preliminary formation of a National Union Catalog of Chinese Antiquarian Books. Meanwhile, a National Union Catalog of Rare Chinese Antiquarian Books will be established on the basis of the general survey. All the precious antiquarian books on this catalog will be given a protective status with added financial support from the government. In addition, for those libraries that have such rare collections will be designated as National Key Protective Units, so as to strengthen the team building of Chinese antiquarian books, their restoration, publication and studies.

Presently, there are five standard guidelines concerning the protection of Chinese antiquarian books that have been announced and promulgated. The first set of *National Directory of Chinese Rare Antiquarian Books* and the first set of *National Key Protective Units of Chinese Antiquarian Books*, both of which have also been announced for the first time.

Additionally, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finance initiated a project called Sending Books to the Rural Areas. During 2003–2005, about 1,000 books of farming subjects were sent to 300 libraries located in those nationally recognized poverty-stricken counties and to more than 3,000 county-level libraries at an annual rate of 1,000 volumes per library and 3,000 volumes per library for three years. There were 330 volumes of books per library per each year that were sent to 3,000 libraries in villages and towns. In 2006, 1.36 million books were sent to the rural areas as the appropriation of RMB ¥ 30 million from the government.

In brief, the implementation of these important cultural projects promotes the public library development in various positive ways in China.

4 A few hot issues of the public libraries of China

In recent years, public libraries of China have gone through a rapid period of development in keeping pace with the fast economic growth of the country. To realize and safeguard the basic cultural rights of the public and to satisfy their basic

cultural needs, the government issued a series of policies like establishing the service system of public culture to serve the whole society, which in turn provide more congenial conditions for public libraries to thrive and flourish in China.

Based on the overall strategy of constructing a public cultural service delivery system, all provincial and metropolitan public libraries in China have been searching an appropriate way to fulfill such a high professional calling in recent years. Owing to the administrative restrictions, by which public libraries in China are invariably subject to the fund appropriation and personnel recruitment policies of their respective local governments, it naturally hinders public library's attempt in trying to extend its services in a united way beyond their judicial parameters. During such experimental explorations in recent years, many public libraries have successfully established various constructive service delivery models that may well serve as examples of modus operandi for other public libraries to emulate in accordance with their own peculiar circumstances. Such examples of the service delivery systems include but not limited to Beijing Public Libraries Information Sharing Network, Library IC Card System of Shanghai Library, Extended Service of Tianjin Library, Guangdong Mobile Library, Foshan United Library, Library IC Card System of Hangzhou, the Library City of Shenzhen, the branch library systems in the city like Suzhou, Jiaxing, Harbin and Xiamen, etc. In Beijing, for example, public libraries are all administrated by the local government, but a complete computer management system has been established in library operation. Under the supervision of Beijing Municipal Government, Beijing Public Library Information Sharing Network is in full operation for some time now. Based on the service handling platform, it links 24 public libraries in Beijing. In the meantime, Beijing public libraries have established a cooperative relationship based on the Protocol of Globalization of Information Resources and the Regulation on Interlibrary Loan. In 2003, the Beijing United Cataloging Center was established. It is the center of bibliographic and monographic resources to perform shared cataloging and united searching. Currently, all libraries and small library reading rooms in residential districts, villages, towns, communities and countryside under the jurisdiction of Beijing municipal government have adopted a single uniform computer management system, which has laid a good foundation for the further development of public libraries of Beijing in the future.

In April 2008, Jiaxing Forum on Constructing Public Library Service System was held by the Library Society of China, which aroused universal attention from the library circle. Librarians discussed the typical modus operandi in the construction of the service delivery system of public libraries from both theoretical and practical perspectives, and the forum provided theoretical support to the related library policies made by the governments of different levels. The service models of public libraries in the city like Suzhou, Jiaxing and Foshan (Chancheng District) are currently the more appropriate models for the Chinese public library system to develop along the line of central-branch hierarchical administrative pattern^[3].

Comparing with the central-branch hierarchical library administrative system in developed countries, it is difficult to emulate this model comprehensively in China due to its administrative restrictions. The key to this system is its central planning, uniform services nature, that is to say, it requires having a clear and



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distributed control of human, financial and material resources. Otherwise, such a central-hierarchical administrative system will not work. In fact, the current administrative system in China poses the biggest threat to the implementation of the central-hierarchical library administrative system. The service models mentioned above are actually the adjusted measures under the present administrative control system.

In addition, the construction of local reading-room libraries (mainly in villages, towns and counties) has been paid close attention by the government. *The Outline of 11th Five-year Plan for National Culture Development* issued in 2006 is the first medium-long term plan for cultural development. It includes many concrete suggestions on the further development of public libraries of China, such as improving the service delivery network of public culture and improving the public network facilities for cultural delivery, etc. It pointed out that we should improve the public cultural facilities in large and medium sized cities and strengthen the construction of the libraries, museums and cultural centers. With regard to the development of basic libraries below the county level (in villages, towns and counties), it also clearly pointed out on the basis of consolidating existing current county public libraries and culture centers, to make sure all counties and towns will have culture stations, villages will have cultural activity rooms, and city and county libraries will develop central-branch hierarchical library administrative system to enrich their collections and to formulate unified book acquisitions and shared consortia online cataloging so as to exert their full influence and guidance on the libraries at and below the county level. In addition, 11th Five-year Plan also requires the government to give sufficient financial support to those basic public libraries and/or reading rooms in remote rural areas so as to assure their healthy long-term development.

All the policies mentioned above will ensure the construction of the local library (mainly in villages, towns and counties) all over the country.

Taking Beijing for example, as the development of the libraries in residential districts, villages and towns was included in *the Outline of 10th Five-year Plan for Beijing Culture Development*; the investment from the government has been on the rise steadily year by year. Nowadays Beijing is advancing the construction of the service networks at four levels that take Capital Library as the center, the libraries in districts and counties as the sub-centers, the libraries in residential districts, villages and towns as the branch centers and the libraries in communities and countryside as the basal centers. At present in Beijing, there is one central library at city level, 23 libraries (including the children's libraries) in districts and counties, 228 libraries in residential districts, villages and towns (with 92% of populace coverage ratio) and 3,089 libraries in communities and countryside (with 48% populace coverage ratio).

The key to the library service system is the construction of local libraries (mainly in villages, towns and counties). The problems of the public library that need to be solved urgently include how to overcome the restrictions of the administrative system, to establish an effective management and operation mechanism and how to overcome the difficulty in constructing more library buildings, in developing policies for personnel recruitment, and in increasing library expenditures and service



programs, etc. The construction of the libraries in communities, villages and towns has a great influence on the overall establishment of the public library service system in general in China. The major existing problems in the local library (mainly in villages, towns and counties) construction projects are the management mechanism, funding and personnel management, etc., which are all being studied intensively by public librarians for hoping to reach some kind of possible resolutions^[4].

In the area of library legislations, several major local public library laws and regulations have been promulgated in recent years. This includes but limited to Beijing Public Library Rules passed on July 18, 2002, which gives legal protection to the development of the public librarianship in Beijing. It guarantees the basic conditions for library development, and more importantly it points out the developmental direction of the public library service system, network construction, and resource sharing in Beijing, etc. Meanwhile, it clarifies Capital Library's central role among all the public libraries in Beijing. Beijing Cultural Bureau puts forward that we should establish a new management system centered on Capital Library and sub-centered on the libraries in districts and counties so as to integrate the public library resources and improve its service capacity. Moreover, the regulations concerning Beijing basic cultural facilities construction and *Guidelines for Beijing Public Libraries' Civilized Service* give added impetus to the local public library (mainly in villages, towns and counties) development in Beijing. The local public library laws have also been enacted in the city of Shanghai, provinces of Liaoning, Zhejiang, Hubei, Guangdong (mainly Shenzhen City), Henan and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, one after another in succession.

In 2005, the Library Law of the People's Republic of China began to be drafted. It clarifies the relationship among the government, the public library and the public, and gives assurance to the funding for public library development and the cultural rights of the public. It is believed that the development of the public librarianship will be secured as the refinement of China library's legislation moves forward step by step. The standards of library building construction, such as the *Land Standard for the Public Library* and the *Construction Standard for the Public Library*, which are in the process of being enacted one after another, will make the construction of public libraries in China from now on follow the route of the established legal channels.

5 The main existing problems of the public library in China

5.1 The problem of the management hierarchy

Public libraries in China are administrated directly by their respective local cultural departments. The regional library has the responsibility and obligation to guide the local library (mainly in villages, towns and counties) operation, but does not have the right to oversee/manage its expenditure, personnel and materials. With the development of the Internet and information technology, the public librarianship has entered Web-based service era. The networked service mode requires that all the resources in each member library form a system open to the public and to allocate their various resources, such as information resources, human resources, financial



resources and management resources, etc. accordingly. The hierarchical management system according to the administrative division has become an obstacle to the development of public library service network.

5.2 The problem of library laws

Despite the fact that a few local library laws have been promulgated and the Library Law of the People's Republic of China has begun its drafting process, the employment at public libraries in China still lacks sufficient legal protections, such as library construction, library funding and qualifications of personnel for entry level positions which all need legislative re-affirmation. In addition, under the protection and support of library laws, public librarianship is to establish a uniform networked service system which is based on one and the same service standard for all member libraries. From this angle, to explore and establish a new library management paradigm by law is the key issue to be resolved for the further development of public librarianship in China.

5.3 The problem of library expenditure

According to the data collected in 2006, there are problems of both insufficient and uneven distributions of public library funding. In 2006, the per capita book-purchasing fund was RMB ¥ 0.5 and the per capita book volume was 0.34 volumes, which was at least four times lower than the book collection standard in *Guidelines for Public Library Services* (1.2–2.5 volumes). Therefore, it is obvious to see that the book-purchasing funds of public libraries fell short to a large extent.

Furthermore, there are differences in the fund allocation for public libraries in different regions. In 2006, the financial allocation to the public library in the city like Beijing and Shanghai as well as in Guangdong Province has accounted for about 25% in the overall national fund appropriation. In 34 administrative divisions of the whole country, the fund allocation to the public library in Shanghai is 90 times more than that to the public library in Tibet Autonomous Region in a whole year. Therefore, the government ought to increase the investment in those public libraries in less developed areas in the Midwest.

5.4 The problem in personnel quality

From the perspective of personnel qualifications, it has a negative influence on the service quality of the public library if the required academic credentials of their librarians are lower than a bachelor degree of universities or of academies of sciences. The public library lacks trained librarians and computer professionals, especially in local libraries (mainly in villages, towns and counties). Moreover, there is no uniform standard for the admission of public librarians to professional practice in China. Many unfavorable factors hinder the public library from improving the quality of library personnel job performance including the underdevelopment of library vocational education for library supporting staff, the brain drain (exodus) of library professionals, and the library science curriculum which detach from realities of library practice, etc.



5.5 The problems of service for readers

5.5.1 The library service concept is conservative

Librarians working in the public library generally lack the initiative to render service pro-actively. They just provide the traditional service in a routine manner without making any innovations in service delivery.

5.5.2 The service scope is narrow

Firstly, the number of the public library in our country is not large enough in terms of quantity and cannot meet the information demand of their readers. Then, the number of service variety is also not large enough. The service cannot be extended to reader's home because the advantages of remote online access are not fully made available to library users and readers can gain access to digital resources only in person in the library.

5.5.3 The service content is simple

The service of the public library of China mainly includes circulation, books lending, lecturing, reader's activities and other traditional service items. With the steady increase of reader's expectations for quality service, the readers are increasingly expecting knowledge-based services. Therefore, public librarians should attach great importance in continuously broadening their knowledge scope and in acquiring new skills of applicable information technologies so as to provide more value-added services to their readers.

In conclusion, the public librarianship of China has developed very fast in recent years. With the generous support from the government, public libraries in China begin to measure up to those more advanced public libraries in the world. Nonetheless for some historical reasons, there are some serious problems demanding immediate attentions and quick solutions such as in the areas of library administrative structure, library legislation, the funding to the smaller local libraries (mainly in villages, towns and counties) and standard qualifications for different levels of library professionals and support staff, etc. It is believed that these problems will be resolved in the not too distant future and the public librarianship in China holds an indisputably bright development prospect.

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